

Pianist Katia Skanavi with Chamber Music Society of Fort Worth

By Olin Chism

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Just before Saturday afternoon's performance for the Chamber Music Society of Fort Worth, pianist Katia Skanavi spoke a few words in tribute to Van Cliburn, who died Feb. 27.

It was a moving gesture, and, whether intended as such or not, the music-making that followed could be heard as a touching farewell to Fort Worth's most beloved musician.

Skanavi, who is Russian, got to know Cliburn when she played in and reached the finals of the 1997 Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. She was an audience favorite, which may help explain the presence of a larger-than-usual audience at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth.

She was an impressive artist at the Cliburn, and she is even more impressive now. Her performance of Schumann's Piano Quintet in E-flat -- a work much heard at Cliburn semifinals through the years -- was fresh, gripping and moving.

Her partners deserve credit as well: violinists Emanuel Borok and Felix Olschofka, violist Susan Dubois and cellist Eugene Osadchy. Skanavi is too mature an artist to try to dominate a chamber performance. Her presence is strong when need be, but she's happy to move into a supporting role when that's called for.

The outcome was that the five musicians gave a subtle, fluidly paced, well-balanced performance that soared with melodic beauty and provided its share of thrills as well. A work such as the Schumann quintet can wear thin after innumerable hearings, but this time it soared.

Skanavi and Osadchy also soared with another performance full of personality. Prokofiev's Sonata for Cello and Piano, Opus 119, was alternately full of melodic beauty and downright playful, and enchanting throughout.

One nice point about Skanavi's playing is that her piano's tone remained pleasant even during loud passages.

Chamber Beauty

Pianist Katia Skanavi, cellist Eugene Osadchy and violinist Emanuel Borok turn in a stunning, if uneven, performance for Chamber Music Society of Fort Worth.

by [J. Robin Coffelt](#) TheaterJones.com
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Saturday's concert by the Chamber Music Society of Fort Worth, held in the recital hall at the Modern Museum of Art in Fort Worth, featured pianist Katia Skanavi. Although she was given top billing, this performance was a true collaborative effort, and Skanavi blended beautifully with the other musicians for a true chamber experience. The intimate recital hall at the Modern lends itself well to chamber concerts, and it was an ideal venue for this concert; other concertgoers must have thought so as well, as the hall was fairly full.

Skanavi opened the concert with a brief and touching eulogy to Van Cliburn, remarking on him as a man of "modesty, generosity, and no pretense" and noting that as she is Russian, he is particularly special to her. (She was a finalist in the 1997 Van Cliburn International Piano Competition.)

Then she and University of North Texas faculty cellist Eugene Osadchy opened the program with Prokofiev's Sonata for Cello and Piano in C Major, Op. 119. Prokofiev is not best known as a composer of chamber music and did not write much music for cello, but wrote this sonata for his younger friend Mstislav Rostropovich in 1949, only four years before Prokofiev's death. While Skanavi's playing featured lovely sensitivity and effective use of dynamics, never overpowering the cello, Osadchy's playing was absolutely gorgeous. He has a rich, full, round cello tone, beautiful vibrato which he adjusts to the mood of each movement and superlative technical finesse. The two also seemed well-connected; the ending of the first movement, particularly, was spine-tingling, principally because the two musicians were working together to create one piece of Prokofievian lushness.

The last two movements of the Prokofiev sonata are technically quite challenging, and both musicians navigated those challenges with skill and finesse. Prokofiev can throw some unusual demands at the string player especially, and Osadchy managed them with brilliance. His col legno (playing with the wood of the bow instead of the hair) really spoke, his stopped glissando double-stop harmonics (if you aren't a bowed string player, you can just substitute "really, really difficult things" for that phrase) were amazing, and through it all, he maintained an

atmosphere of playful insouciance, as if these obstacles were no big deal at all. Skanavi also maneuvered skillfully through the complexities of Prokofiev's harmonies, again making the technical challenges seem insignificant and allowing both her pianism and Prokofiev's music to shine..

The last work on the program, Schumann's Piano Quintet in E-flat Major, Op. 44, was notably more successful than the Beethoven. This was perhaps because it is technically less demanding, or perhaps because capable pianist Katia Skanavi returned to the stage for this quintet scored for string quartet and piano. But for whatever reason, the musicians' sensitivity and lyricism were on display in the opening two movements, while the third movement, a scherzo and trio, featured some truly exciting playing. With dramatic dynamic contrasts at work here, the quintet truly came alive, and whipped listeners up into a flurry that was stilled by the delicate sensitivity of their ensemble in the fourth movement, marked Allegro ma non troppo. The quintet took this allegro at a brisk tempo, but not troppo (too much), as the rapid pace worked well for the end of the piece and the end of the program. It was an enjoyable ending to an ambitiously programmed, uneven program that nevertheless had moments of great brilliance and beauty. **TJ**

LIVE REVIEW: PIANIST KATIA SKANAVI, MUSICA VIVA

Diana Carroll | 13/05/2009

Article from: Adelaide Independent Weekly

Acclaimed pianist Katia Skanavi played at the Town Hall on her debut Australian tour. Once again, Musica Viva can take credit for bringing the world's best classical performers to Adelaide.

Skanavi's extraordinary talent was recognised from a young age and she was only in her teens when she first came to prominence. She was a finalist at the prestigious Van Cliburn competition and many commentators thought she should have won; indeed, Skanavi's success does seem to have eclipsed that of the winner.

After something of a respite from the stage to enjoy motherhood, Skanavi is back displaying all the technical excellence for which she is renowned and a maturity of interpretation that makes her playing so magnetic. She has said that she is focusing on a select repertoire of composers, and this intimacy with the music was evident in her playing.

The recital opened with Schubert's Piano Sonata in A Minor, a piece of intense musical and thematic contrasts. Wearing a backless evening gown, Skanavi seemed fused to the piano, leaning deeply into the instrument with her bare arms enveloping the keyboard in a sensuous embrace. This was a raw, aching Schubert, full of emotion and demanding to be heard.

This was followed with Carl Vine's Piano Sonata no 3, a structurally exciting work that sounds distinctly more modernist than postmodern. Vine is Musica Viva's Artistic Director and this year's featured composer – deservedly so, having listened again to his Third. There is much to love in this work, and its complexity grows on you with each listening.

The rest of the program was dedicated to Chopin with his renowned Funeral March and the even more moving Piano Sonata no 3 in B minor. Technically, these pieces both make high demands on even the most exacting musician, but Skanavi's outstanding pianism was more than equal to the task.

As always, it is her nuanced musicality, rather than her musicianship alone, that makes Skanavi such a captivating performer. Her interpretations of these well-known works are unmistakably her own, often taut and pared back, at other times furious and fiery. This duality of discipline and passion, each jousting for supremacy, is perhaps reflective of her mixed Russian and Greek heritage and makes Katia Skanavi a thrilling performer. Bravo, Musica Viva, for bringing her to Adelaide.

A YOUTHFUL FLAIR FOR THE OLD MASTERS

Mark Coughlan | May 07, 2009 Article from: The Australian
Katia Skanavi. Perth Concert Hall, May 5.

KATIA Skanavi is a young Russian pianist, Moscow born and trained, and an experienced competition player who has made an impression recording, among other things, Russian piano music.

Whatever preconceptions a pedigree such as this might suggest, in reality Skanavi is a very surprising package. The most striking thing about this recital for Musica Viva, at the start of her first Australian tour, is that Skanavi plays with a maturity and artistic vision that one normally associates with performers 20 or 30 years her senior.

From the opening theme of Schubert's elusive A minor Sonata it was clear that she has an exceptionally refined sense of musical discourse. Skanavi brings a purposeful concentration to every note she plays, and the intensity of her interpretations is utterly compelling. She has an immaculate technique; not just in terms of speed and dexterity but also

in her control of tone colour and sonority and, above all, a luminous, singing melodic touch. Her sense of musical line is highly refined, and in music that is principally melodically driven, like most of this recital, she plays with a rhythmic suppleness that ensures the music's lyricism is always to the fore.

Chopin's second piano sonata, with its famous funeral march, is one of the most over-played works in the repertoire, yet Skanavi's performance was fresh and imaginative. Her playing in the lyrical sections of the second and third movements was delicately enticing; her phrases starting and ending in a whisper, the rhythm poised yet stretched out to create a rapt stillness. By contrast, the finale rushed past in a whirlwind. With great dexterity, a gossamer-light touch and expert pedalling, Skanavi created an almost impressionistic soundscape here.

Similarly impressive was Chopin's Andante Spianato and Grande Polonaise Brillante. Skanavi brought a poetic grace to the andante that was reminiscent of an old-school master and the repetitions in the polonaise provided the opportunity to show her pianistic versatility, with every repeat given a slightly different treatment.

That Skanavi is comfortable in a range of styles was evidenced in her persuasive account of Carl Vine's highly appealing third piano sonata. Despite the virtuosic nature of some of the writing, her playing was always thoughtful and refined, her fine ear for piano textures creating beautiful tapestries of sound from this often complex score. This was a recital of the highest order. Skanavi is definitely a pianist to watch.

KENNEDY CENTER TERRACE THEATER

“Skanavi brings sheer entertainment value to the concert stage. She is a strikingly attractive performer, and she’s not afraid to play the role of the Romantic pianist. She bows in the great Paderewski tradition, bending almost in half. And she plays with her head tilted back, as if searching for some inspirational muse lurking about the ceiling ... She pounced on Liszt’s Tarantella with enough ferocity to elicit an audible gasp from the audience. And she created Niagras of sound in Rachmaninoff’s Prelude in B-flat.” – The Washington Post

CINCINNATI SYMPHONY

“In her CSO debut (she) put her lyrical and technical prowess to work in two glittering showpieces by Chopin on Sunday night The Moscow native clearly has an affinity for Chopin: after all, it was Chopin’s Sonata No. 2 that propelled her to the final round of the 1997 Van Cliburn Competition.” – The Cincinnati Enquirer/The Fort Worth Star-Telegram, 11/15/2000

Pianist Katia Skanavi, finalist of the 1997 Cliburn Competition, reiterated several of her special strengths Tuesday night on the Cliburn series in her first appearance at Bass Performance Hall. Skanavi departed from the beaten path by presenting a Chaconne of Handel at the competition in 1997; she turned to the baroque again to open this concert with J.S. Bach's French Suite No. 2 in C minor, a six-movement work that is familiar to any well-trained pianist but generally absent from the concert stage. Here, she ranged from clavichord-like intimacy in the opening Allemande to angular muscularity in the closing Gigue. Other high points included the deliciously noisy Courante and the heartbreakingly tender Sarabande.

Katia Skanavi, Russian pianist, packs a wallop

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1/24/2000 NANCY RAABE News staff writer

The Alys Stephens Center's Reynolds-Kirschbaum Recital Hall, as fine a small performance space as Birmingham may ever see, opened a little too quietly back in September. But the crashing prowess pianist Katia Skanavi brought to her UAB Piano Series recital there Sunday made up for whatever fanfare was lacking last fall. Born in Russia and a Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory graduate, Skanavi's name came into circulation when she made it to the final round of the 1997 Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. Her specialty is mainstream 19th-century repertory, and there was plenty of just that on Sunday's program.

Three observations emerged from this up-close experience with the young virtuoso. First, her playing can pack a wallop. Chopin's Andante spianato et Grande Polonaise Brillante was high on majestic pomp and ceremony in typical high-Romantic fashion; one wondered what the composer, whose own playing was "fleet, fluid, light in touch, small in tone, greatly varied but within a very small range," as the program note reminded us, would have thought. Even grander in scale were three

preludes by Rachmaninoff. Second, she shared with us an alert, inquisitive mind willing to take finely nuanced interpretive chances. These showed up to best advantage in the series of paintings that constitute Schumann's Carnival, Op. 9, as a series of delectable rubati, each boasting enough rhythmic freedom to keep us following Skanavi's train of thought but never too much to destroy the underlying metrical structure. Third, most of the higher dynamic volumes throughout this program proved too much for the intimate confines of this hall, which seats about 175. Skanavi's performance was largely symphonic in scope, and probably would have sounded better in the 1,330-seat Jemison Concert Hall next door. But the pianist seemed less concerned about where she was and how she might best communicate meaningfully with her audience than in making the wealth of musical points she clearly has the chops to drive home.

Superb soloist dazzles concert

By Mark Benoit

The Press-Enterprise

SAN BERNARDINO

Stewart Robertson and the San Bernardino Symphony Orchestra delivered considerably more than they promised Saturday. The featured performer was Katia Skanavi, one of the six finalists at this year's Van Cliburn International Piano Competition in Fort Worth, Texas. She didn't win a medal in Texas, but she won the hearts of an appreciative audience at the California Theatre with a dazzling rendition of the Saint-Saens Piano Concerto No. 2 in G minor. The concerto gives the soloist ample opportunity to demonstrate technical mastery while at the same time it is a very satisfying experience for the listener. Skanavi delivered both technical bravado and listener satisfaction. She presented a commanding presence from the moment she strutted on stage in a dazzling red sleeveless gown with a glistening beaded bodice. After a few moments of difficulty apparently adjusting the height of the piano bench, she launched into an exquisitely intricate solo passage to open the concerto. Robertson and the orchestra provided solid support, but Skanavi was constantly the center of attention as she navigated delicate lyrical passages and hammered out fortissimo sections with sensitivity and precision.

Particularly enjoyable was the playful middle movement, with a neat, comical change of pace a couple of minutes in.

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